

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for allocating work items in a contact center, comprising:

(a) providing a set of resources operable to service a work item, the set of resources comprising a plurality of members;

(b) requesting, by a processor, at least some of the resources in the set of resources to submit a bid to service the work item;

(c) receiving, from at least one member of the set of resources, at least one bid to service the work item; and

(d) based, at least in part, on the at least one bid, selecting, by the processor, a resource from among the set of resources to service the work item.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein the set of resources comprises a plurality of resources external to the contact center, wherein the at least one member of the set of resources is a plurality of members of the set of resources, wherein the work item is a contact from a customer, wherein the work item is in a queue of multiple work items, and wherein the selected resource is one of the plurality of members.

3. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising:

identifying a subset of resources from among the set of resources qualified to service the work item; and wherein, in the requesting step, a bid request is provided to each of the resources in the subset of resources.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein the requesting, receiving and selecting steps are performed only during a first bidding operational mode in which bidding is performed and not in a second operational mode in which bidding is not performed, the first and second operational modes being temporally discrete from each other.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein the requesting step comprises:

monitoring at least one queue of work items, the at least one queue of work items corresponding to a first set of resources for servicing work items in the at least one queue; and

applying the following rules to the results of the monitoring step:

_____ when a predetermined workload level exists in the at least one queue, performing steps (b) through (d); and

_____ when a predetermined workload level does not exist in the at least one queue, not performing steps (b) through (d).

6. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 5, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when there is a likelihood that a service goal for at least one work item in the at least one queue will not be satisfied in the absence of bidding.

7. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the requesting step comprises:

determining a time interval for performance of steps (b) through (d).

8. (Original) The method of Claim 5, wherein the monitoring step comprises:

determining, from the at least one queue, a representation of a required queue for at least one goal to be realized for each work item in the at least one queue.

9. (Original) The method of Claim 8, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when a queue position in the required queue is less than a number of work items ahead of the queue position in the required queue.

10. (Original) The method of Claim 5, further comprising:

determining a time when the predetermined workload level will likely exist.

11. (Original) The method of Claim 5, further comprising:

determining a number and identities of work items to be presented for bidding to the set of resources.

12. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the selecting step comprises:

comparing the received bids with a maximum acceptable bid.

13. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the selecting step comprises:

determining, for each bidding resource, a composite value reflecting a plurality of a work item value, a resource value and a bid; and

comparing the determined composite values to select a resource to service the work item.

14. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising after the receiving step: determining whether or not a workload level for the contact center requires the work item that is the subject of the received bids to be serviced by a resource in the set of resources.

15. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising after the selecting step: displaying the selected bid and/or information associated with the selected bid to at least some resources in the set of resources; and receiving additional bids after the displaying step.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1, wherein at least some of the resources are human agents, wherein the members of the set of resources are not employees of the contact center, wherein the members of the set of resources are not subscribers to an enterprise network defined by the contact center, and wherein steps (b)-(d) are performed when a second set of resources is unable to service the contact as required by contact center policies, objectives, and/or goals, the second set of resources being employees of the contact center and subscribers of the enterprise network.

17. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the bid is at least one of a monetary service fee, a service time, an opportunity cost to the contact center for servicing the work item, and an overhead cost to the contact center for servicing the work item.

18. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein a plurality of work items are put out for bid and further comprising:

dynamically varying a bidding time for each of the plurality of work items.

19. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium containing instructions for performing that, when executed, perform the steps of Claim 1.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Currently Amended) A table maintained in an electronic memory of a contact center method, comprising:

maintaining, by a processor, a computer readable medium encoded with at least the following variables:

_____ an identity of at least one work item;

_____ at least one a plurality of bids received [[for]] from a plurality of human agents to service the at least one work item; and

_____ for each received bid:

_____ an identity of a ~~resource~~human agent placing the bid; and
_____ at least one of a value of the ~~resource~~human agent and a value of the work
item.

22. (Currently Amended) The ~~table~~method of Claim 21, wherein the work item is a
customer contact with a contact center and further comprising:

a composite value based on the at least one bid and the at least one of a resource value
and work item value, ~~the resource value being associated with a respective human agent and the~~
~~work item value being associated with the respective work item~~.

23. (Currently Amended) The ~~table~~method of Claim [[21]]22, wherein the at least one
of a resource value and work item value comprises both the resource value and the work item
value ~~and wherein the composite value is based on the at least one bid, the resource value, and~~
~~the work item value~~.

24. (Original) A contact center for servicing a plurality of contacts received from a
plurality of customers, comprising:

a plurality of workstations corresponding to a plurality of resources;

a central server in communication with the plurality of workstations, comprising:

at least one queue of contacts; and

a bid item selecting agent operable to (a) request at least some of the plurality of
resources to submit a bid to service at least one contact; (b) receive at least one bid to service the
at least one contact; and (c) select a resource from among the plurality of resources to service the
at least one contact.

25. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the plurality of workstations
are external to the contact center and define a second set of workstations and the plurality of
resources define a second set of resources and further comprising:

a first set of workstations corresponding to a first set of resources, wherein the
workstations in the first set are internal to the contact center and wherein the workstations in the
first workstation set are different from the workstations in the second workstation set.

26. (Original) The contact center of Claim 25, further comprising at least one second
queue for holding contacts to be serviced by the first workstation set, wherein the contacts in the
at least one queue of contacts are selected from the at least one second queue.

27. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the central server comprises a workload monitoring agent operable to monitor the at least one queue of contacts and determine, for each contact, at least one of a bid start time, a bidding process duration, and a bid completion time.

28. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue comprise one or more of realtime and non-real time contacts, wherein the plurality of resources are not employees of the contact center, wherein the plurality of workstations are not subscribers to an enterprise network defined by the contact center, and wherein operations (a)-(c) are performed when a second set of resources is unable to service the contact as required by contact center policies, objectives, and/or goals, the second set of resources being employees of the contact center and having workstations that are subscribers of the enterprise network.

29. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is further operable to identify a set of resources from among the plurality of resources qualified to service the contact; and provide a bid request to each of the resources in the set of resources.

30. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent requests, receives and selects bids when a bidding operational mode is in effect but not when a bidding operational mode is not in effect, wherein in the bidding operational mode bids are accepted.

31. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is operable, when a predetermined workload level exists in the at least one queue, to perform functions (a) through (c) and, when a predetermined workload level does not exist in the at least one queue, not to perform functions (a) through (c).

32. (Original) The contact center of Claim 31, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when there is a likelihood that a service goal for at least one contact in the at least one queue will not be satisfied.

33. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is further operable to determine a time interval for performance of steps (a) through (c).

34. (Original) The contact center of Claim 27, wherein the monitoring agent is operable to determine, from the at least one queue, a representation of a required queue for at least one goal to be realized for each contact in the at least one queue.

35. (Original) The contact center of Claim 34, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when a queue position in the required queue is less than a number of enqueued contacts ahead of the queue position in the required queue.

36. (Original) The contact center of Claim 34, wherein the monitoring agent is operable to determine a time when the predetermined workload level will likely exist.

37. (Original) The contact center of Claim 34, wherein the monitoring agent is operable to determine a number and identities of contacts to be presented for bidding to the set of resources.

38. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is operable to compare the received bids with a maximum acceptable bid.

39. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent is operable to determine, for each bidding resource, a composite value reflecting a one or more of a contact value, a resource value and a bid and compare the determined composite values to select a resource to service the contact.

40. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent, after performing the receiving function, is operable to determine whether or not a workload level for the contact center requires the contact that is the subject of the received bids to be serviced by a resource in the plurality of resources.

41. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the selecting agent, after performing the selecting function, is operable to display the selected bid and/or information associated with the selected bid to at least some resources in the plurality of resources and thereafter receive additional bids.

42. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein at least some of the resources are human resources, wherein the plurality of resources are not employees of the contact center, wherein the plurality of workstations are not subscribers to an enterprise network defined by the contact center, and wherein operations (a)-(c) are performed when a second set of resources is unable to service the contact as required by contact center policies, objectives, and/or goals, the second set of resources being employees of the contact center and having workstations that are subscribers of the enterprise network.

43. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein the bid is at least one of a monetary service fee, a service time, an opportunity cost to the contact center for servicing the work item, and an overhead cost to the contact center for servicing the work item.

44. (Original) The contact center of Claim 24, wherein a plurality of contacts are put out for bid and the selecting agent is operable to vary dynamically a bidding time for each of the plurality of contacts.

45. (Original) A contact center for servicing a plurality of contacts received from a plurality of customers, comprising:

a plurality of workstations corresponding to a plurality of resources;
a server in communication with the plurality of workstations, comprising:

at least one queue of contacts; and

a bid item selecting means for (a) requesting at least some of the plurality of resources to submit a bid to service at least one contact; (b) receiving at least one bid to service the at least one contact; and (c) selecting a resource from among the plurality of resources to service the at least one contact.

46. (Original) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the plurality of workstations are external to the contact center and define a second set of workstations and wherein the plurality of resources define a second set of resources and further comprising:

a first set of workstations corresponding to a first set of resources, wherein the workstations in the first workstation set are internal to the contact center and wherein the workstations in the first workstation set are different from the workstations in the second workstation set.

47. (Original) The contact center of Claim 45, further comprising at least one second queue for holding contacts to be serviced by the workstations in the first workstation set, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue of contacts are selected from the at least one second queue.

48. (Original) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the central server comprises a workload monitoring means for monitoring the at least one queue of contacts and determining, for each contact, at least one of a bid start time, a bidding process duration, and a bid completion time.

49. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the contacts in the at least one queue comprise one or more of realtime and non-real time contacts, wherein the

plurality of resources are not employees of the contact center, wherein the plurality of workstations are not subscribers to an enterprise network defined by the contact center, and wherein operations (a)-(c) are performed when a second set of resources is unable to service the contact as required by contact center policies, objectives, and/or goals, the second set of resources being employees of the contact center and having workstations that are subscribers of the enterprise network.

50. (Original) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means is further operable to identify a set of resources from among the plurality of resources qualified to service the contact; and provide a bid request to each of the resources in the set of resources.

51. (Currently Amended) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means requests, receives and selects bids when a bidding operational mode is in effect but not when a bidding operational mode is not in effect, wherein bids are accepted when the bidding operational mode is in effect but not when the bidding operational mode is not in effect.

52. (Original) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means is operable, when a predetermined workload level exists in the at least one queue, perform functions (a) through (c) and, when a predetermined workload level does not exist in the at least one queue, not performing functions (a) through (c).

53. (Original) The contact center of Claim 52, wherein the predetermined workload level exists when there is a likelihood that a service goal for at least one contact in the at least one queue will not be satisfied.

54. (Original) The contact center of Claim 45, wherein the selecting means is further operable to determine a time interval for performance of steps (a) through (c).